

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY—
The Founders, the Builders and the Guardians

Part 2

SALIM ALI

(With Three Plates)

[Continued from Vol. 75 (3): 569]

I had originally thought to deal separately with the Founders, the Builders and the Guardians of the Society. However, except for the Founders as listed chiefly in Part 1 of this paper, it is difficult to tell the other two categories apart considering that their activities overlap so closely. Both are therefore being treated together henceforth.

The Builders and the Guardians

CHARLES LIONEL AUGUSTUS DE NICEVILLE
1852-1901 (Vol. 14: 140) Anon.

The scion of a noble Huguenot family long domiciled in England, and the last Baron of his line. From his early schooldays de Nicéville showed a decided bent for entomology and spent all his spare time in studying insects instead of participating in the ordinary school games. He came out to India in 1876 and held several minor non-scientific appointments, one of the last being as Clerk in the Calcutta Small Causes Court! He employed his holidays and daily leisure in the study of Oriental butterflies, on which he published over 70 papers, and came to be recognized as 'the greatest authority'. By experimental breeding de Nicéville proved that in many cases seasonal forms of the same butterfly had been wrongly separated as species, and by the same method he was also able to elucidate the biology of many other forms. His entomological researches in the East extended far and wide—from Ladakh to Sumatra and Japan. He described many new species

of butterflies and contributed much to our knowledge of the distribution of these insects. His work for many years—apparently part-time and voluntary—was carried out in a room allotted to him in the Indian Museum, and the very fine and extensive collection which he kept there was later acquired by that institution. He was a frequent contributor to various scientific journals including those of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Bombay Natural History Society. His papers in the latter, mostly on insects, chiefly butterflies, are spread between Volumes 2 and 13. He was of the greatest assistance to the editors of the *Journal* as he long undertook the correcting of proofs, a task in which he was most painstaking and assiduous. The qualities of method and industry were characteristic of the man and make his publications of the very highest value. His great work on the *Butterflies of India, Burma and Ceylon* was unfortunately never finished, but such portions of it as were published have been of very great usefulness. For the three years 1881-1884 de Nicéville was put on special assignment in the Indian Museum for the arrangement of its butterfly collection. It was only a few months before his untimely death in December 1901 that he had the satisfaction of being officially appointed to the Indian Museum in the newly created post of Government Entomologist. His singularly kind and genial disposition had endeared him to all. With a wide capacity for enjoyment of life he combined singularly simple tastes, and both

in this and in the equanimity of his temper and cheerfulness he showed himself a true philosopher.

ROBERT A. STERNDALE 1839-1902 (Vol. 14. 804) by Editors

Mr. Sterndale came to Bombay soon after the Bombay Natural History Society was formed (1883) and at once joined it, and worked for it with characteristic enthusiasm. That it rose so rapidly from the littleness and obscurity of its origin must be attributed in a great measure to its good fortune in having among its members a naturalist of Mr. Sterndale's distinction, and one so exceptionally qualified by his versatile gifts to popularize its work. The list of contributions from his pen (in Vols. 1 and 2) gives no idea of the extent to which the Society was indebted to him. The idea of starting a journal originated with him and proved practicable only because of the way in which his ready pen and pencil solved all difficulties. Mr. Sterndale's presence at the monthly meetings also added to much of their interest. He was not a museum naturalist but a lover of animals, and he imparted a living interest to every creature about which he discoursed. He continued to edit the *Journal* till he left Bombay in 1887 to become Governor of the island of St. Helena.

R. A. Sterndale was the author of A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MAMMALIA OF INDIA AND CEYLON published in 1884—a popular work which was well received and is still of great relevance and usefulness to the student of Indian Mammals.

CHARLES THOMAS BINGHAM 1848-1908
(Vol. 19: 214) by H.M.L.(efroy)

Lieut.-Colonel, late Bengal Staff Corps and Conservator of Forests, Burma. Widely known

as a keen naturalist who during his long service in Burma devoted himself to the study of Natural History. Though his work was not crowned by academic honours or the fellowship of learned societies, it will rank with that of Wood-Mason and de Nicéville, and to no one has it been possible to so signally advance the study of the subject to which he devoted himself. The large collections made by him formed the basis of much of the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA volumes on butterflies, bees and wasps. As a keen and dedicated observer he added much to our knowledge of the ways and habits of bees and wasps. His earlier papers related to birds and were published in *Stray Feathers* between 1876 and 1881. After the founding of the Bombay Natural History Society, by which time his interest seems to have switched mainly to insects, he published frequently in the *Journal*. Col. Bingham had the rare distinction of combining the rigid accuracy of the systematist with the breadth of view and power of observation necessary for studying the living insect in its many activities and varied habits. The two volumes of the FAUNA dealing with the Aculeate Hymenoptera of India and Burma represent the result of his special study. Col. Bingham undertook the completion of the unfinished work of Lionel de Nicéville on the FAUNA Butterfly volumes after the latter died in 1901. The two volumes dealing with the Nymphalids, Papilionids, Pierids and part of the Lycaenidae were published, and the final volume was in preparation at the time of his death.

He succeeded Dr. W. T. Blanford as Editor of the FAUNA OF INDIA in 1905, and workers in Indian entomology owe a great debt to his untiring efforts to secure the cooperation of authorities in Zoology and to give help of every possible kind to workers in India.

Col. Bingham joined the Society in 1887 and remained an active member until his death

in England in 1908. Between Volumes 3 and 13 of the *Journal* there are 14 papers and notes by him chiefly on Hymenoptera, including a very useful one on their collection and preservation.

EUGENE W. OATES 1845-1911 (Vol. 21: 651)
by W.R.O.-G. (Ogilvie-Grant)

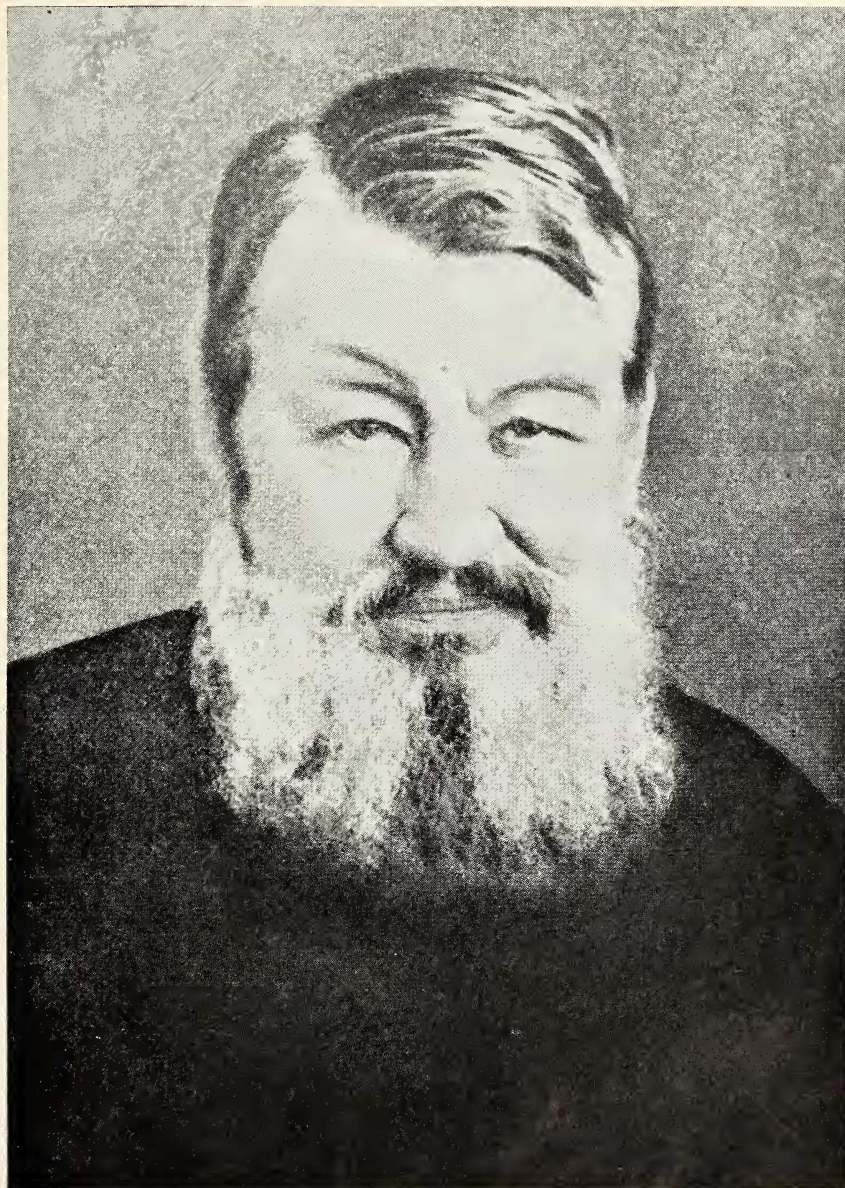
Died 16th November 1911 aged 66. Served in the Public Works Department in Burma from 1867 to 1899, and was Chief Engineer at the end of his service. He was an ardent naturalist with few equals as an ornithologist, and devoted all his spare time to the study of his favourite science. When in England in 1882-3 he spent much of his time at the British Museum, Bloomsbury, in preparing his first well-known work *A HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF BRITISH BURMAH*. Subsequently he wrote the first two volumes on Birds in the *FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA* series edited by W. T. Blanford. On page 290 of Vol. 2 of this otherwise admirable work there is a ridiculous and puzzling description of the call of the Streaked Wagtail (*Motacilla ocularis*) as "a prolonged Pooh". 'The explanation of this remarkable statement may now be given the author and editor, as well as the perpetrator of the joke being now, alas, dead' writes his obituarist. 'When Oates was in the middle of preparing his second volume, at the Natural History Museum, the writer and the late Dr. Sharpe happened to pass the table covered with his manuscript on their way to lunch, and Sharpe, who loved a joke, said "let us add something funny to Oates's description of this Wagtail", little thinking that his remarks would get into print. He never doubted that the eagle-eye of the author would detect and strike out the line, after having a laugh over it, knowing the source from whence it came'. The incident was forgotten, the volume

completed and Oates returned to India. The long forgotten joke unfortunately went unnoticed in the revises of the proofs; thus has the impossible call of the wagtail remained a standing perplexity to ornithologists and 'a warning to all practical jokers'. Oates's other well-known books included a second edition of Hume's *NEST AND EGGS OF INDIAN BIRDS* and *A MANUAL OF THE GAME BIRDS OF INDIA*. He also wrote the first and second volumes of the *CATALOGUE OF THE COLLECTIONS OF BIRDS' EGGS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM*, covering about 50,000 specimens, and was joint author with Capt. Savile G. Reed of the third and fourth volumes of the same work. In the last years of his life Oates became deeply interested in the difficult group of Kalij and Silver Pheasants of which his fine collection was transferred to the Natural History Museum shortly before his death.

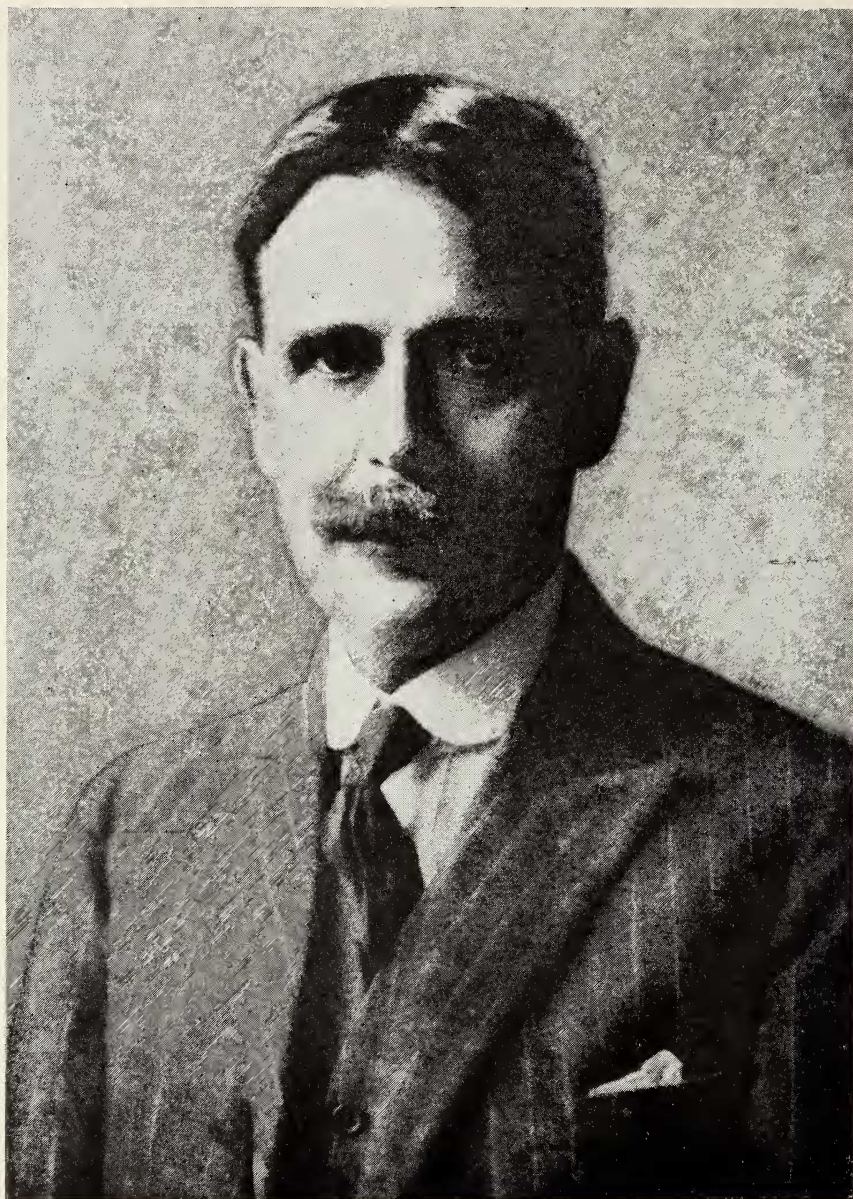
Oates is described by those who knew him as being a lovable but at times a hot tempered man. The fact that Hume made over to Oates the whole of his notes and correspondence when the latter was preparing his work on *THE NESTS & EGGS OF INDIAN BIRDS* testifies to the high regard he inspired in his contemporaries.

REV. FR. F. DRECKMANN, S.J. 1840-1917
(Vol. 25: 293—photo) by E.B.(latter)

Born in Soest in Westfalia (Germany). Joined the Society of Jesus at the age of 19. After going through the usual comprehensive course of philosophical, scientific and theological studies he was sent out to India in 1874 and posted to St. Xavier's College in Bombay, soon to be made Professor of Physics, and 10 years later, Principal of the College. Fr. Dreckmann was a zealous and enthusiastic student of natural history and a prominent member of the Bombay Natural History



F. Dreckmann
(1840-1917)



Nelson Annandale
(1876-1924)

Society almost from its very beginning. He contributed some interesting notes to the earlier volumes of the *Journal*, and the very first plate published in it belongs to an article by Fr. Dreckmann on 'An undescribed Homalopsida'. For a number of years he was on the Society's Executive Committee and President of the Reptile and Fish sections. From early youth he took a delight in watching reptiles and birds, and later in life he made a special study of the snakes of the Bombay Presidency. During his accustomed holidays in Khandala he would wander about in the wild romantic ravine that stretches out between 'Reversing Station' (now demolished) and the 'Duke's Nose' and study its flora and fauna. Bloodsuckers, scorpions, spiders, jungle cats, snakes and other interesting denizens of the wilds were the most favourite objects of his observations. He knew how to catch alive the most deadly snakes with an almost uncanny calmness, and would watch their habits in captivity. Fr. Dreckmann was not a writer and very little has been published under his name; but many a scientific article written by others has been enriched by his valuable accurate observations. He was a man of deep conviction, transparent sincerity, and unflinching courage in expressing his opinions. He hated cant and hypocrisy and liked to deal with men who were sincere and upright, and anything savouring of underhand dealing was detestable to him.

LIEUT.-COL. K. R. KIRTIKAR, I.M.S. (Retd.)
1849-1917 (Vol. 25: 295) by E.B.(latter)

Born in Bombay. After medical training in the Grant Medical College he went to England to compete for the Indian Medical Service, then virtually a British preserve. Soon after his return to India he was sent out from 1878 to 1880 on field service in the Afghan

War where he distinguished himself for gallant behaviour in the battle of Maiwand. In 1902 he became Brigade Surgeon Lieut-Colonel, and retired from service in 1904 to take up permanent residence at Andheri (now in Greater Bombay). Col. Kirtikar's interests were many and varied—social, literary and scientific. One subject in which he had shown special interest and marked talent throughout his career was Botany. 'I found him amidst his books, chiefly botanic, and he delighted in showing me his valuable volumes, his microscopes, his collections of dried plants, his water colours of Algae and Fungi, and many other things that interest only an enthusiast... He had kept his eyes open, he had read a good deal, he had seen much in many lands, he had taken notes on many botanical subjects and jotted them down in books and on slips of paper that were scattered all over the library. There is no department in Botany, except perhaps physiology, which he did not cultivate... The many contributions to our journal (chiefly in volumes 1-10, especially the serial on 'The Poisonous Plants of Bombay' in 19 parts between volumes 7 and 11 and then in volumes 14 and 15) were written at a time when professional duties claimed all his energy, and it is astonishing that he has been able to do so much. A posthumous work of his ON INDIAN MEDICAL PLANTS was published in 1918, and revised in 1933 by Blatter *et al.* and is recognised as the standard manual on the subject.

ROBERT CHARLES WROUGHTON 1849-1921
(Vol. 27: 929) by Oldfield Thomas

Born at Nusseerabad, the son of Major-Gen. R. C. Wroughton, himself an ardent sportsman and naturalist. Served with distinction in the Indian Forest Service from 1871-

1904, starting as Asst. Conservator in Bombay Presidency, and ending as Inspector General of Forests for India. During his service he was specially interested in ants. He collected abundant material and acquired considerable knowledge working in conjunction with the well-known Swiss formicologist Forel. Towards the end of his official career he took to collecting scorpions and myriopods for the benefit of R. I. Pocock of the British Museum on the basis of which material the latter published two papers in Vol. 7 of the *Journal*, the same issue in which also appears a paper on Scorpions by Wroughton himself. Soon thereafter he began collecting the series of bats on which his first mammal paper, 'Some Konkan Bats' published in 1899, (JBNHS Vol. 12) was based; and it was in working out these at the South Kensington Museum during a furlough in England that Wroughton found his metier as a mammalogist, a capacity in which he later did so many years admirable work.

On retirement he settled near London and was a regular attendant at the Natural History Museum. He now turned his attention to African mammals, large collections of which were then coming in from colonial Africa. It was while engaged in their study that he realized, and bitterly deplored the paucity of material from 'our greatest dependency' in the British Museum collections. And it was in the collusion between Wroughton and W. S. Millard, when the latter became Honorary Secretary of the Society, that the splendid idea of the Mammal Survey of India, Burma and Ceylon was conceived and carried through. 'This Survey is undoubtedly the finest thing of the sort that has ever been done, if we except the American Survey of their own Territories, done out of Government funds, while the Bombay Survey has been mainly carried out by private generosity. The Survey, the

material obtained by it for the benefit of the National (i.e. British) and Bombay museums, and the papers written on this material all together form a monument to Wroughton's memory which will remain as long as Zoology exists.' Wroughton's mental energy was astounding. No work was too laborious, too great or too difficult for him to start on. Most striking of his personal characteristics were his simplicity, his keen humour and his power of attracting the willing voluntary help of his co-workers.

DR. HENRY NEVILLE COLTART 1873-1922
(Vol. 29: 266) Anon. [E. C. Stuart Baker]

Came to India in 1899 as Medical Officer to the Makum Tea Company in N. Lakhimpur district, Assam and immediately took up the study of the local avifauna for which his position gave him exceptional facilities. As a medical doctor he came into friendly contact with the various tribes of the adjoining Naga Hills and by his patient attention to their complaints and illnesses earned their respect and admiration. It was through them that he was able to obtain many of his greatest rarities in birds as well as their eggs, and to discover the breeding habits of many species unknown till then. This is how he obtained his earliest specimens of the hornbill *Ptilolaemus tickellii austeni*, then only known from those obtained by Godwin-Austen and Dr. Ernst Hartert. The rare laughing thrush (Ogle's) *Garrulax nuchalis* he discovered breeding within a stone's throw of his dispensary at Makum, and he was also the first to unravel the breeding habits of many other birds such as *Alcippe rufogularis*, *Dicaeum trigonostigma*, *Heteroxenicus sinensis*, etc. Amongst his other Assam discoveries, named in his honour by Dr. Hartert and Mr. Stuart Baker are *Stachyris nigriceps coltarti* and

Alcedo asiatica coltarti. He was a close associate and collaborator of E.C. Stuart Baker who was also in Assam as a Police Officer in that period. Many of Coltart's discoveries are described or recorded by Baker in his various papers on Assam avifauna in the *Journal*, and constantly referred to in the *New Fauna*, including also recollections of dubious sightings, years earlier, of highly unlikely extralimital species "when accompanied by my friend Dr. Coltart"—long since dead and incapable of corroborating! In 1900 he moved to Bihar in a new assignment, but still continued to do good ornithological work, though in that very thoroughly worked area, the home ground of Inglis and others, his opportunities for discovering novelties were greatly inhibited. Dr. Coltart was a good athlete and excelled in all outdoor games such as tennis, hockey, football and polo. He left India in 1913 to join his father's medical practice in England.

ALEXANDER MELFORT PRIMROSE 1872-1922
(Vol. 29: 546) by C.M.I.(nglis)

Came out to India in 1888 aged 16. Started his career as a tea planter in 1893 on the Bagh-o-Bahar tea garden in Cachar, a new garden just being opened up in primeval forest, where he was able to indulge, to a very large extent, his taste for natural history and to spend his most successful collecting days. He subsequently went to the Surma and Rema tea gardens in South Sylhet and was there till early 1902. Thereafter, following a short spell in tea in the Nilgiris, on the Terramia and Halashana gardens, he returned to Assam joining the Mornai garden of the Sonthal Mission in the Goalpara district where he remained till January 1908. This was far away from any railway station, and the proximity of forests and of the Sankos river gave him good opportunities for small game shooting and

fishing. It was here that the new subspecies of Painted Quail, *Perdica manipurensis inglisi* was obtained, also the first eggs of the Emerald Cuckoo, *Chalcites maculatus*. His next assignment was on Longview Estate in Darjeeling district from 1910-1913, after which he returned to Assam where he remained till 1921, his last garden being Murphulani, also an opening-up job in the midst of forest. These historical data concerning Primrose's movements are important because of the various dates and localities labelled on his many bird specimens now in the Society's collection, either presented by himself or accessioned indirectly. Although his principal interest was birds it was by no means confined to them; he also made a fine collection of snakes while he was in Sylhet. 'As a naturalist he was exceedingly observant and a true field ornithologist, being no lover of the present day minute differentialities nor of "dry-as-dust" lists, and the writer was often chaffed by him about some of his writings which appertained to that description'. A.M.—'Prim' to his intimate friends—died of typhoid fever while on a visit to his brother Colin at Bhind in Gwalior.

JOHN DUNCAN INVERARITY 1847-1923 (Vol. 29: 822) Anon.

Born in Bombay, educated in England. Returned to Bombay in 1869 where by sheer force of character and brilliancy of intellect he soon established himself as one of the leading lights of the Bombay Bar. He was a great lawyer who, according to the then Chief Justice of Bombay High Court 'for thirty years had no equal in India'. But outside the law Inverarity's reputation rested on his prowess as a big game hunter and naturalist. He was closely associated with the Society almost from its inception in 1886, and was Vice President from 1897 to the time of his death. His varied